

E. O. Hoppé: Early London Photographs (1910-1939)

March 14 – April 25, 2009

Opening: Saturday, March 14th, 6 – 8pm

Bruce Silverstein Gallery is pleased to announce Emil Otto Hoppé: Early London Photographs (1910-1939). This body of work is one of the most unique photographic documents of London. Over 35 years the German-born British photographer captured the city at a critical point in its transition from a 19th Century city into a modern metropolis.

Working systematically in order to build a collection for publication, Hoppé chronicled the landmarks and architectural fabric that defined the city of London. His work can be compared to Eugene Atget's photographs of Paris, and Bernice Abbott's of New York both in scale and modernistic approach. He recorded the break with academic and historical traditions in architecture, and the post World War I modernity creeping into the city in the form of graphics, motorcars and in the lifestyles of its inhabitants. By using the camera to compose scenes with sharp angles or by using layered or compressed space, recognizable topography was shown in new ways. These photographs not only show Hoppé as one of Britain's pioneering modernists, but also that London contained the same visual cues that inspired the early photo-modernists views of New York by his contemporaries, Edward Steichen, Paul Strand and Alfred Steiglitz, suggesting that another parallel history of photography remains untold.

Another significance of this previously unseen series of Hoppé's work lies not only in the gap it bridges in the photographic history of London, but also in Hoppé's influence in validating photography as an artistic medium to his British contemporaries. For many, his work questioned the perception of photography as an anonymous record of reality and began to reconcile this with the other perception of the medium as a self-conscious artistic construct. His strength was the synthesis of documentation and lyricism in his photography, marrying personal perception with objective fact.

Born in Germany in 1878, Hoppé was of English citizenship and actively worked from 1905 – 1945. He was the prototypical celebrity photographer, photographing the most famous of the time, and by 1913 his photographic operations occupied the 33-room Kensington House of the late Sir John Everett Millais. His work was widely exhibited in his lifetime and is held in collections at the National Portrait Gallery and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London amongst others. His work fell into obscurity after his retirement in 1945, locked into archives at the Mansell Collection London's oldest picture library known only to a few photography scholars, curators and a handful of collectors. This is the first opportunity to view and purchase these unique vintage London prints by Hoppé whom fellow photographer, Cecil Beaton, referred to simply as: *The Master*.